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ABSTRACT

Millikin University in Illinois has about 2400 students and is committed to providing small, seminar-style, learning opportunities in every course. Millikin's Political Science Department has earned recognition institutionally and nationally for its work. In the summer of 2001, the department decided to revamp the curriculum and made a conscious decision to move away from the traditional subfield-based curriculum and embrace an objectives-based curriculum. One concern with the new objectives-based curriculum was that it would entail more intensive academic advising. How could the students and their faculty advisors learn the system and keep track of their progress? The answer was a simple, useful tool to help assess whether the students were meeting departmental objectives, a Web-based plan of study. This paper describes the Web-based plan of study and outlines its advantages. The paper also delineates the objectives of the department, lists core courses, and provides sample course descriptions. It explains that students create their own Web-based inventory of objectives to help them assess their progress in each critical area and that the program is also helpful in assisting the department assess its ongoing programs. (Author/BT)

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ED 479 701

The Web-Based Plan of Study: Advising Technology With the Personal Touch

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SO 035 298

Paper prepared for presentation at the 2003 American Political Science Association annual meetings, held in Philadelphia, PA

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B. D. Posler

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> *"Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes...derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals" (AAHE 1992)*

I have often heard colleagues lament that students fail to retain very much specific information from any given course when asked 5 or 10 years later (or even after a single semester). Pure mastery of material is not really our prime goal in education so much as mastery of skills. To be able to question authority, find needed information, to evaluate it critically and to communicate their analysis effectively seem to be the sorts of things a political science major ought to be take from her time with us.

We have found ourselves unsatisfied with available assessment tools for student learning. Many of the standardized tests available focus solely on memory of content, and there is much more to learning than mastery of content (Bransford et al. 1999). The measurement of student outcomes is the most desirable sort of assessment (Astin 1993), and pure content focused examinations do not get at outcomes. Use of student portfolios is a stronger measure (Cambridge 1996, Jones 1996), but tends to bias the assessment toward the written word, and often the quality of the portfolios end up highly variable or very work intensive on the part of students and faculty. We decided to develop a simple, useful tool to help us assess whether our students were meeting departmental objectives.

Our University and Our Department

Millikin University has about 2400 students, and is committed to providing small, seminar-style learning opportunities in every course. All courses emphasize mastering writing, critical reasoning, and oral communication skills. Accountability and preparedness are vital elements of a Millikin student's success at the University. The Millikin Program of Student Learning has earned national recognition, and we value our reputation as an institution that values community and collaboration, and I think our department is especially good at fostering these values.

Our Political Science Department has earned recognition within our university and nationally for our work in these areas. Our students complete significant training in scientific methodology and research design. In addition, all of our students complete original research. Courses within the major rely on the development of students' writing skills, analytical capabilities, oral and written communication.

In the summer of 2001, our department decided to revamp the curriculum. We had two members at the time, so it seemed a logical time to go on retreat and work to improve the experience for students while capitalizing on the strengths of our department faculty. We made a conscious decision to move away from the traditional subfield-based curriculum, and embraced an objectives-based curriculum

Movement to an Objectives-Based Curriculum

Therefore, we rejected the old model of dividing our discipline into substantive areas and having students choose from a menu of courses by topic. This would mean a de-emphasis on the "tracks" such as American Politics or Legal Studies. It would also mean that we would no longer focus as much on substantive "breadth" and "depth" as in the past.

Instead, for each student, we would through the advising process determine which skills set is desired, and match students up with courses that will give them the practical skills they need to be successful in their goals for life after Millikin.

We developed a set of critical intellectual skills that all students must master to be successful, as well as a set of ancillary, enhancing skills that different students will be able to pick and choose between based upon their individual needs. For each course that we offer, we will continue to work on many skills, but choose up to three focus objectives that we will help students improve as they learn the subject matter for that particular course. In our required course offerings, we will insure that all critical objectives are being offered, as well as a variety of enhancing skills so that good choices will be available for all of our students. We mapped all of our objectives onto all of our courses as part of our summer work, insuring that every objective is reflected at least once in the required courses.

By having an objectives focus, we can ensure that students realize the pragmatic utility of each course in the curriculum, as well as having students see the developmental process within

themselves while they are here. Students will be encouraged to do additional work in their weak areas, as well as encouraged to try to master new skills not yet attempted. It will improve the advising process as well, for students and their advisors will be charged with determining the status of their skills set and which skills need further work.

Need for Better Academic Advising

One concern with this new objectives-based curriculum was that we would have to engage in more intensive academic advising. It is one thing to insure that students have met all of the course requirements in a substantive subfield, but it is much more difficult to insure they are making satisfactory progress on a whole host of objectives. How can the students and their faculty advisors learn the system and keep track of their progress?

The Web-Based Plan of Study

Our answer is the web-based plan of study. Students would need to become familiar with the objectives, and pick and choose their own experiences to maximize their learning of their chosen objectives. Our web site seemed the logical place for much of this to occur. In developing the site, we made it easy to navigate between the departmental objective descriptions and the courses where each objective is a focus, so students can with a single click learn how best to work on any given objective.

More importantly, each student is able to use the web-based plan of study tool to build their own, personal, objectives inventory. Students login with their password, and then are prompted to select the courses they have completed that semester. Automatically, the skills they have worked on in those courses get added to their inventory. In addition to the political science courses, if we are able to map skills onto other courses offered at the university we have added those as well. All of our general education courses in the Millikin Program of Student Learning have specific objectives that map very well onto the scheme we have adopted for our department, so all of the G.E. courses are included in this inventory.

In addition, because students will work on their skills in still other courses, and in ways outside the classroom (through internships, study abroad, employment, etc.) students are allowed to manually add records to their personal inventory. If they completed an internship where they worked on oral presentation skills, they can input that work and add the record to their inventory. In this way, their inventory provides an up-to-date complete record of the student's progress on every one of the departmental objectives. They can update it prior to each advising session, and print it out to discuss with their advisor.

Advantages

1) Students and advisors see the glaring holes and the strengths at a glance. With the inventory, it is easy to see which objectives need more effort and which ones the students have worked on several times. It is a measure of quantity, so although it shows nothing

about the quality of work in the area, it provides the tool for discussion between advisor and advisee.

2) Students like the website and will use it more than our older printed handbooks. Maneuverability allows immediate links to needed courses and experiences, and students feel like they have all of the information they need about the various courses.

3) It is customized to each student, and helps him or her feel engaged with the process. They are in control of which objectives they wish to enhance beyond the minimum required. They get to manually add any of their experiences they wish, and feel like all of their work "counts".

4) It helps students integrate learning across the curriculum. This system emphasizes how the whole of their education, in and out of the classroom fits together and is mutually reinforcing. This is a challenge for many students, and this tool helps them see how every choice they make fits together.

5) The inventories are helpful to faculty as we write letters to prospective employers and graduate programs. We, at a glance, know a great deal about what the student has done beyond our own classroom. We can write better letters about how deliberately the students have approached their own educational goals.

6) It helps with departmental assessment as well, serving as a model for other departments

The web-based plan of study is a useful tool. It certainly cannot replace strong academic advising, but it really enhances the conversation about learning outcomes, helps our students have some ownership over their educational goals, and helps us continue to gauge how successfully our department is meeting its stated goals.

OBJECTIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY

These objectives are recognized not only on the departmental level, but in differing degrees within individual courses.

Knowledge

• *Place within Communities*— In our community of scholars we integrate the study of local, state, national, international, and global communities in a manner that conveys skills relevant to different disciplinary subfields of political science, shows an interconnection among the fields, and develops a sense of citizenship in the different communities.

- Local
- National
- State
- Global

• *Historical and Contemporary Frameworks*—As political scientists, we engage in systematic analysis of political activity. Such analysis is impossible without a basic familiarity with both historical and contemporary political events, which allows us to place the events that particularly interest us in context. Thus, students should acquire a broad foundation in the current and historical patterns of both the American political system and other political systems around the world.

• *Modes of Inquiry*—Students will be exposed to the breadth of the theories and models within the various subfields of the discipline. Students should be able to use information, compare cases, evaluate and interpret statistical analysis, and demonstrate an ability to understand implications of data.

Skills

• *Critical Thinking*—Students should continually strive to develop increasingly sophisticated skills, read primary sources critically, research the models and analysis of others in the field, integrate and evaluate others' work, think strategically about how various possible outcomes might be attained, apply those concepts and findings in new areas, and gain insight through reflection.

- Reading Critically
- Moral/Ethical Reasoning
- Application
- Reflection
- Research
- Integration
- Strategic Thinking

• *Methodological*— The study of politics is a science and students will need to increase their skill in its various methodologies. Students will develop abilities in quantitative and qualitative analysis, use the scientific method, compare cases and utilize historical analysis, become conversant with quantitative reasoning and statistics, and use information technology to analyze and present information graphically.

- Analysis
- Scientific Method
- Comparing Cases
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Information Technology
- Historical Analysis

• *Communication*—All political science courses focus on developing and honing students' skills in most basic and sophisticated forms of communication. Skills such as writing, asking logical and coherent questions, working and deciding both collaboratively and independently, advocating a position, negotiating an outcome, and presenting professionally one's research and one's ideas are central to the department's purpose and mission.

- Collaboration
- Negotiation
- Oral Communication
  - Deliberation
  - Questioning
  - Formal Presentation
- Advocacy
- Writing

Values

• *Citizenship*—Regardless of their political philosophies and values, students learn to appreciate the perspectives and differences of others, become politically attentive and actively engaged, and pursue social justice in their communities.

- Appreciating Diversity
- Service/Civic Engagement
- Cross-Cultural Understanding
- Social Justice

• *Self-Development*—Our scholarly community fosters an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity and risk-taking which requires students and faculty to stretch beyond simplistic or dogmatic thinking to embrace a nuanced, clear-eyed understanding of our political environment. Intellectual curiosity and risk-taking are also inextricably intertwined with lifelong learning, the perpetual striving for greater understanding that characterizes our alumni long after they leave Millikin. Lifelong learning is only possible when one demonstrates a respect for others and oneself. A respect for the values and opinions of others is necessary for us to challenge and reinvigorate our own beliefs and values. A respect for one's own capacity for insight and understanding is necessary for us to effectively defend our views and act upon our principles. To willingly enter this process of continued challenge, reinvigoration, defense, and action is to continually pursue professional excellence in any field.

- Commitment to Professional Excellence
- Intellectual Curiosity and Risk-taking
- Life-Long Learning
- Respect for Self and Others

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
CORE COURSES

(ideal cohort)		
Fall Year One	**PO105**	**Foundations of American Politics**
Spring Year One	PO110	Countries and Concepts*
Fall Year Two	PO280	Methods of Political Analysis
Spring Year Two	PO205	State and Local Politics*
Year Three/Four	PO371	Internship
Spring Year Four	PO480	Senior Seminar
Before graduation		one PO course exploring outside the US

MAJOR ELECTIVES

PO220	Current American Foreign Policy
PO221	Understanding International Conflict*
PO230	Civil Rights in the United States (US Studies)
PO232	Law and Justice: Creating Change* (US Studies)
PO235	Introduction to the Criminal Justice System
PO244	Campaigns and Elections
PO248	The American Presidency*
PO320	Diplomacy and International Organizations*
PO321	Global Issues* (Global Studies)
PO322	States in a Changing World* (Global Studies)
PO330	Constitutional Law
PO334	Civil Liberties and the Constitution
PO339	Seminar in Judicial Decision Making
PO340	The U.S. Congress: Pursuing Majorities*
PO342	Parties and Interest Groups
PO370	Internships
PO375	Political Simulations—Model Illinois Government/Model United Nations
PO391/392	Independent Studies
PO491	Senior Honors Thesis

TOTAL HOURS 36-41 FOR GRADUATION
18 HOURS REQUIRED COURSES

Millikin University

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

SAMPLE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

PO 105: FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT **3 credits**

This class emphasizes the understanding of specific political issues, the manners through which the process works (and does not), and explores the implication of current political event. Focused on students, who already have an interest in politics and are interested in examining the discipline of Political Science, the course will investigate ways in which political scientists measure and analyze political issues. Course assignments will emphasize reading critically, integration, analysis, and the ability to question individually and deliberate in a group. This course prepares students for the rigors of further work in the Political Science department.

PO 221: UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS **3 credits**

The course will provide the student with a conceptual and empirical overview of international politics. First, the core theory of realism and the problem of war and its causes will be scrutinized through an in-depth study of historical cases. We will play the game of "Diplomacy" in order to gain understanding of realism. The second part of the course will focus on the issues and concepts associated with non-realist theories of international relations, especially the notion of "complex interdependence." For this purpose, we will simulate the proceedings of the United Nations Security Council. Finally, we will examine the different visions of New World Order. The skills emphasized in the course will be moral and ethical reasoning, strategic thinking, historical analysis, negotiations and writing.

PO280: METHODS OF POLITICAL RESEARCH **4 credits**

In this course students will learn: to apply the concepts of scientific understanding and progress; to build explanatory models of the political world; to develop and test scientific hypotheses; to collect and utilize data from both primary and secondary sources; to use computers for statistical analysis; to design, execute, and present an original research project; to understand and interpret the scholarly work of others; to understand the uses and misuses of scientific research; and to prepare for more advanced work in the Political Science Department. Prerequisite: PO 100 or 105 or professor's consent.

PO 321: GLOBAL ISSUES **3 credits**

The series of courses under this heading will attempt to explain the dramatic political, social, economic and cultural issues which batter our world: terrorism, international crime, economic globalization, etc. Each semester the course may focus on different issues. However, each time will be asking similar questions: can freedom and justice emerge from the current clash between cold tyranny of the markets and frenetic violence of militant nationalist and religious movements? The course will explore these questions using unconventional readings, films, in-class simulations and investigative projects by the students. Our focus will be global and we will engage in moral and ethical reasoning, strategic thinking, negotiations, writing, questioning and deliberation. One of the values fostered in the course will be cross-cultural understanding.

PO330: CONSTITUTIONAL LAW **3 credits**

This course acts as an introduction to constitutional case law and to the practical effects of our legal system (courts and judicial politics) on the American political system. The role of the federal judiciary, focusing on the Supreme Court, in interpreting constitutional and statutory law and in making policy will be studied. Exploration of the elements of judicial interpretation and the examination of judicial opinion writing will be major components of this course. This course looks not only at what the Constitution says about basic constitutional conflicts, but examines the Court decisions, current and past, that affect our current political climate. The skills of reading critically, comparing cases, advocacy, and writing are emphasized. One of the value goals of the course is commitment to professional excellence. Prerequisite: Political Science 100 or 105.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
Core Courses and Electives
2002 Curriculum Revision

	KNOWLEDGE						SKILLS																				VALUES									
	Place within communities				Historical & Contemporary	Modes of	Critical Thinking							Methodological						Communication							Citizenship				Self-Development					
	Local	State	National	Global			Reading Critically	Research	Moral & Ethical Reasoning	Integration	Application	Strategic Thinking	Reflection	Analysis	Quantitative Reasoning	Scientific Method	Information Technology	Comparing Cases	Historical Analysis	Collaboration	Advocacy	Negotiation	Writing	Oral Communication: Questioning	Oral Communication: Deliberation	Oral Communication: Formal Presentation	Appreciating Diversity	Cross Cultural Understanding	Service/Civic Engagement	Social Justice	Commitment to Professional Excellence	Life Long Learning	Intellectual Curiosity & Risk-Taking	Respect for Self and Others
PO 100 American Politics for Non-Majors			•		•						•					•				•				•					•					
CORE COURSES																																			
PO 105 Foundations of American Politics			•		•		•			•				•										•	•		•			•				•
PO110 Countries and Contexts			•	•			•								•			•	•		•					•		•					•	•
PO205 State and Local Politics	•	•						•		•						•		•					•					•						
PO200 Methods of Political Analysis						•		•							•	•	•						•			•							•		

	KNOWLEDGE							SKILLS																				VALUES									
	Place within communities				Historical & Contemporary		Modes of	Critical Thinking								Methodological						Communication								Citizenship				Self-Development			
	Local	State	National	Global	Reading Critically	Research	Moral & Ethical Reasoning	Interpretation	Application	Strategic Thinking	Reflection	Analysis	Quantitative Reasoning	Scientific Method	Information Technology	Comparative Cases	Historical Analysis	Collaboration	Advocacy	Negotiation	Writing	Oral Communi-cation: Questioning	Oral Communi-cation: Deliberation	Oral Communi-cation: Formal Presentation	Appreciating Diversity	Cross-Cultural Understanding	Service/Civic Engagement	Social Justice	Commitment to Professional Excellence	Life-Long Learning	Intellectual Curiosity & Risk-Taking	Respect for Self and Others
PO371 Internships								•		•	•	•													•										
PO480 Senior Seminar				•			•		•		•						•	•				•					•		•						
One course outside of the United States				•			•													•					•										
ELECTIVE COURSES																																				
PO220 Understanding International Conflicts				•		•	•			•						•				•	•								•						
PO 221 Current American Foreign Policy		•	•							•								•	•			•	•			•									
PO 230 Civil Rights in the United States					•	•	•											•							•		•								
PO 232 Law and Justice: Creating Change		•			•	•	•											•							•										
PO 235 Introduction to the Criminal Justice System		•	•				•															•													•
PO 244 Campaigns and Elections		•	•									•						•				•					•		•						
PO 248 The American Presidency			•		•		•					•					•	•			•								•						

| | KNOWLEDGE | | | | | | SKILLS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | VALUES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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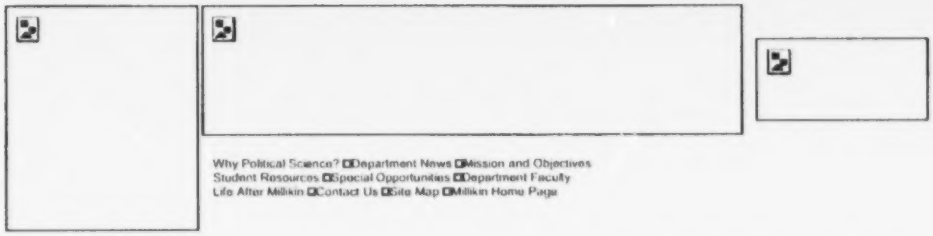

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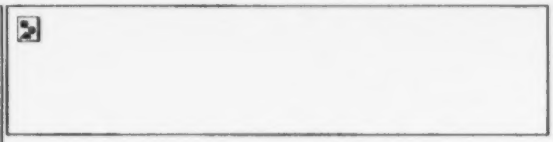
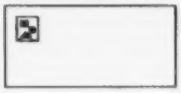

Add Courses and Skills

Add Course(s)

- PO 100 American Politics for Non Majors
- PO 105 Foundations of American Politics
- PO 110 Countries and Contexts
- PO 205 State and Local Politics
- PO 220 Understanding International Conflicts
- PO 221 Current American Foreign Policy
- PO 230 Civil Rights in the United States
- PO 232 Law and Justice: Creating Change
- PO 235 Introduction to the Criminal Justice System
- PO 244 Campaigns and Elections

Add Course(s)

Delete	Course	Skills
	PO 105 Foundations of American Politics	National, Historical & Contemporary Frameworks, Reading Critically, Integration, Analysis, Questioning, Deliberation, Appreciating Diversity, Commitment to Professional Excellence, Respect for Self and Others
	PO 110 Countries and Contexts	National, Global, Reading Critically, Quantitative Reasoning, Comparing Cases, Historical Analysis, Advocacy, Formal Presentation, Cross Cultural Understanding, Intellectual Curiosity & Risk Taking, Respect for Self and Others

Add Skill(s)

- Local
- State
- National
- Global
- Historical & Contemporary Frameworks
- Modes of Inquiry
- Reading Critically
- Research
- Moral & Ethical Reasoning
- Integration

Hyperlink to Artifact (optional)

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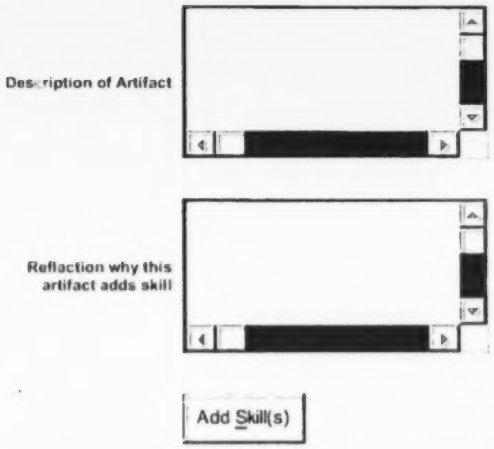

Edit	Delete	Skill	Hyperlink	Description	Reflection
		Research	http://www.millikin.edu	This is a research paper on local city government.	This paper gives skill in reasearch because ... blah blah blah
		Information Technology	http://www.millikin.edu	This is my website I created in dreamweaver.	This gives skill in IT because ... blah blah blah

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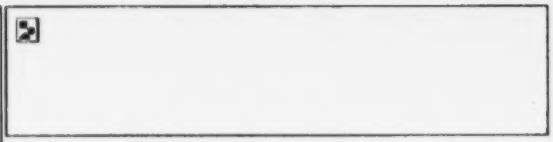
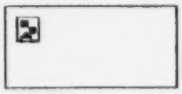

Objectives of the Department of Political Science

These objectives are recognized not only on the departmental level, but in differing degrees within individual courses.

Add to records regarding a skill. Add Record

Knowledge

Place within communities

- [1] Local
- [2] State
- [1] National
- [2] Global

Historical & Contemporary Frameworks [1]

Modes of Inquiry [0]

Skills

Critical Thinking

- [3] Reading Critically
- [1] Research
- [0] Moral & Ethical Reasoning
- [2] Integration
- [2] Application
- [1] Strategic Thinking
- [0] Reflection

Methodological

- [1] Analysis

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- [3] Quantitative Reasoning
- [4] Scientific Method
- [2] Information Technology
- [1] Comparing Cases
- [1] Historical Analysis

Communication

- [2] Collaboration
- [2] Advocacy
- [3] Negotiation
- [0] Writing

Oral Communication

- [1] Questioning
- [1] Deliberation
- [2] Formal Presentation

Values

Citizenship

- [0] Appreciating Diversity
- [4] Cross-Cultural Understanding
- [2] Service/Civic Engagement
- [1] Social Justice

Self-Development

- [1] Commitment to Professional Excellence
- [1] Life-Long Learning
- [2] Intellectual Curiosity & Risk Taking
- [1] Respect for Self and Others

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